

SET A PURPOSE FOR READING

Read "Scout's Honor" to find out what happens when the narrator and his city friends go camping.

Scout's Honor

Short Story by
AVI



PREDICT

Reread lines 1–14. Underline details that tell you about the narrator's experience with the "country." Write one clue in the chart and make a prediction about how easy camping will be for the narrator.

| Clues |
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| Prediction |
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BACKGROUND The Boy Scouts of America is an organization that strives to develop young people's character, physical fitness, and sense of citizenship. Boy Scouts are asked to meet requirements by participating in outdoor activities and educational challenges. When Boy Scouts meet these requirements, they receive a new title and rank. In "Scout's Honor," a group of boys try to complete the requirements that will move them to Second Class.

Back in 1946, when I was nine, I worried that I wasn't tough enough. That's why I became a Boy Scout. Scouting, I thought, would make a man of me. It didn't take long to reach Tenderfoot rank. You got that for joining. To move up to Second Class, however, you had to meet three requirements. Scout Spirit and Scout Participation had been cinchy. The third requirement, Scout Craft, meant I had to go on an overnight hike in the *country*. In other words, I had to leave Brooklyn, on my own, for the first time in my life.

Since I grew up in Brooklyn in the 1940s, the only grass I knew was in Ebbets Field¹ where the Dodgers played. Otherwise, my world was made of slate pavements, streets of asphalt (or cobblestone), and skies full of tall buildings. The only thing "country" was a puny pin oak tree at our curb, which was noticed, mostly, by dogs. ②

1. **Ebbets Field:** The Los Angeles Dodgers were the Brooklyn Dodgers until the late 1950s. They played in the Ebbets Field stadium.

khaki (kăk'ē) *n.* cloth made of light yellowish brown cotton or wool

PREDICT

What do you predict will happen? Record your thoughts in your graphic organizer.

| Clues |
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| Prediction |
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CHARACTER AND THEME

Reread lines 36–45. Underline words that describe Horse and Max and write a description of them on the lines below.

Horse: _____

Max: _____

I asked Scoutmaster Brenkman where I could find some country. Now, whenever I saw Mr. Brenkman, who was a church pastor, he was dressed either in church black or Scout **khaki**. When he wore black, he'd warn us against hellfire. When he wore khaki, he'd teach us how to build fires.

"Country," Scoutmaster Brenkman said in answer to my question, "is anywhere that has lots of trees and is not in the city. Many boys camp in the Palisades."

"Where's that?"

"Just north of the city. It's a park in Jersey."

"Isn't that a zillion miles from here?"

"Take the subway to the George Washington Bridge, then hike across."

I thought for a moment, then asked, "How do I prove I went?"

Mr. Brenkman looked deeply shocked. "You wouldn't lie, would you? What about Scout's honor?"

"Yes, sir," I replied meekly. ③

My two best friends were Philip Hossfender, whom we nicknamed Horse, and Richard Macht, called Max because we were not great spellers. They were also Scouts, Tenderfoots like me.

Horse was a skinny little kid about half my size whose way of arguing was to ball up his fist and say, "Are you saying . . . ?" in a threatening tone.

Max was on the pudgy side, but he could talk his way out of a locked room. More importantly, he always seemed to have pocket money, which gave his talk real power. ④

I wasn't sure why, but being best friends meant we were rivals too. One of the reasons for my wanting to be tougher was a feeling that Horse was a lot tougher than I was, and that Max was a little tougher.

Ⓓ CHARACTER AND THEME

Reread lines 50–63. What do you learn about Horse and Max, based on what they say?

Ⓔ PREDICT

Why do the boys think it is okay that they are telling a lie? What does this lead you to predict about how the adventure will turn out?

50 “I’m going camping in the Palisades next weekend,” I casually informed them.

“How come?” Max challenged.

“Scout Craft,” I replied.

“Oh, *that*,” Horse said with a shrug.

“Look,” I said, “I don’t know about you, but I don’t intend to be a Tenderfoot all my life. Anyway, doing stuff in the city is for sissies. Scouting is real camping. Besides, I like roughing it.”

“You saying I don’t?” Horse snapped.

60 “I’m not saying nothing,” I said.

They considered my idea. Finally, Horse said, “Yeah, well, I was going to do that, but I didn’t think you guys were ready for it.” Ⓔ

“I’ve been ready for *years*,” Max protested.

“Then we’re going, right?” I said.

They looked around at me. “If you can do it, I can do it,” Max said.

“Yeah,” Horse said thoughtfully.

The way they agreed made me nervous. Now I really
70 was going to have to be tough.

We informed our folks that we were going camping overnight (which was true) and that the Scoutmaster was going with us—which was a lie. We did remember what Mr. Brenkman said about honesty, but we were baseball fans too, and since we were prepared to follow Scout law—being loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, *and* reverent—we figured a 900 batting average² was not bad. Ⓔ

So Saturday morning we met at the High Street subway
80 station. I got there first. Stuffed in my dad’s army surplus

2. **900 batting average:** In baseball, a batting average is the number of times a batter gets a hit compared to the number of times he bats. A batting average of .900 is nearly perfect, since it means the batter gets a hit 90% of the time. The boys use this term to mean that since they have followed most of Scout law, they are above-average Scouts, even if they tell a lie.

knapsack was a blanket, a pillow, and a paper bag with three white-bread peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches—that is, lunch, supper, and Sunday breakfast. My pockets were full of stick matches. I had an old flashlight, and since I lived by the Scout motto—Be Prepared—I had brought along an umbrella. Finally, being a serious reader, I had the latest Marvel Family comics.

Horse arrived next, his arms barely managing to hold on to a mattress that seemed twice his size. As for food, he had
90 four cans of beans jammed into his pockets.

Max came last. He was lugging a new knapsack that contained a cast-iron frying pan, a packet of hot dogs, and a box of saltine crackers—plus two bottles. One bottle was mustard, the other, celery soda. He also had a bag of Tootsie Rolls and a shiny hatchet. “To build a lean-to,”³ he explained.

Max’s prize possession, however, was an official Scout compass. “It’s really swell,” he told us. “You can’t ever get lost with it. Got it at the Scout store.”

“I hate that place,” Horse informed us. “It’s all new.
100 Nothing real.”

“This compass is real,” Max retorted. “Points north all the time. You can get cheaper ones, but they point all different directions.”

“What’s so great about the north?” Horse said.

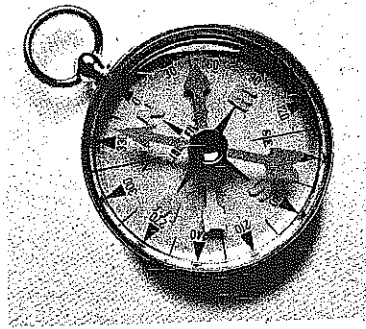
“That’s always the way to go,” Max insisted. ●

“Says who?” I demanded.

“Mr. Brenkman, dummy,” Horse cried. “Anyway, there’s always an arrow on maps pointing the way north.”

“Cowboys live out west,” I reminded them. They
110 didn’t care.

On the subway platform, we realized we did not know which station we were heading for. To find out, we studied



VISUAL VOCABULARY

compass *n.* a device used to determine geographic direction

From what Max says, do you think he understands how to use his **compass**? Explain.

retort (rĕ-tôrt') *v.* to reply, especially in a quick or unkind way

● PREDICT

Reread lines 79–105. Circle the items the boys bring with them for the camping trip. How effective do you predict their camping gear will be?

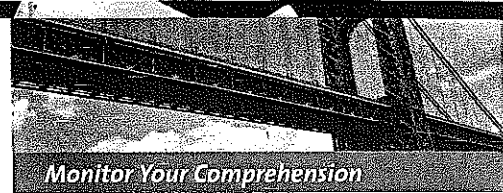
3. **lean-to**: a shelter with a flat, sloping roof.



Is Max telling the truth about crying? How do you know?

Is Max telling the truth about crying? How do you know?

He got out one can without ripping his pocket too badly. Then his face took on a mournful look.



"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Forgot to bring a can opener."

Max said, "In the old days, people opened cans with
150 their teeth."

"You saying my teeth aren't strong?"

"I'm just talking about history!"

"You saying I don't know history?"

Always kind, I plopped half my sandwich into Horse's hand. He squashed it into his mouth and was quiet for the next fifteen minutes. It proved something I'd always believed: The best way to stop arguments is to get people to eat peanut butter sandwiches. They can't talk.

Then we became so absorbed in our Marvel Family comics
160 we missed our station. We got to it only by coming back the other way. When we reached street level, the sky was dark.

"I knew it," Max announced. "It's going to rain."

"Don't worry," Horse said. "New Jersey is a whole other state. It probably won't be raining there."

"I brought an umbrella," I said smugly, though I wanted it to sound helpful. **PAUSE & REFLECT**

PAUSE & REFLECT

Why does the narrator frequently describe himself with positive adjectives and adverbs, such as "always kind" (line 154) and "helpful" (line 166)?

As we marched down 168th Street, heading for the George Washington Bridge, we looked like European war refugees.⁴ Every few paces, Horse cried, "Hold it!"
170 and adjusted his arms around his mattress. Each time we paused, Max pulled out his compass, peered at it, then announced, "Heading north!"

I said, "The bridge goes from east to west."

"Maybe the bridge does," Max insisted with a show of his compass, "but guaranteed, we are going north."

About then, the heel of my left foot, encased in a heavy rubber boot over an earth-crushing Buster Brown shoe,

4. **European war refugees:** people who fled Europe to escape World War II (1939–1945) and its effects.

PREDICT

Underline Max's statement in lines 183–184. What do you predict the boys will do at this point?

CHARACTER AND THEME

Reread lines 180–200. In what ways do the boys try to hide their fear from one another?

started to get sore. Things weren't going as I had hoped. Cheerfully, I tried to ignore the pain.

180 The closer we drew to the bridge, the more immense it seemed. And the clouds had become so thick, you couldn't see the top or the far side.

Max eyed the bridge with deep suspicion. "I'm not so sure we should go," he said. ❶

"Why?"

"Maybe it doesn't have another side."

We looked at him.

"No, seriously," Max explained, "they could have taken the Jersey side away, you know, for repairs."

190 "Cars are going across," I pointed out.

"They could be dropping off," he suggested.

"You would hear them splash," Horse argued.

"I'm going," I said. Trying to look brave, I started off on my own. My bravery didn't last long. The walkway was narrow. When I looked down, I saw only fog. I could feel the bridge tremble and sway. It wasn't long before I was convinced the bridge was about to collapse. Then a ray of hope struck me: Maybe the other guys had chickened out. If they had, I could quit because of *them*. I glanced back.

200 My heart sank. They were coming. ❷

After they caught up, Horse looked me in the eye and said, "If this bridge falls, I'm going to kill you."

A quarter of a mile farther across, I gazed around. We were completely fogged in.

"I think we're lost," I announced.

"What do we do?" Horse whispered. His voice was jagged with panic. That made me feel better.

"Don't worry," Max said. "I've got my compass." He pulled it out. "North is that way," he said, pointing in the
210 direction we had been going.



Horse said, "You sure?"

"A Scout compass never lies," Max insisted.

"We lied," I reminded him.

"Yeah, but this is an *official* Scout compass," Max returned loyally.

"Come on," Max said and marched forward. Horse and I followed. In moments, we crossed a metal bar on the walkway. On one side, a sign proclaimed: NEW YORK; on the other, it said: NEW JERSEY.

220 "Holy smoke,"⁵ Horse said with reverence as he straddled the bar. "Talk about being tough. We're in two states at the same time."

It began to rain. Max said, "Maybe it'll keep us clean."

"You saying I'm not clean?" Horse shot back.

Ever friendly, I put up my umbrella.

We went on—Max on one side, Horse on the other, me in the middle—trying to avoid the growing puddles. After a while, Max said, "Would you move the umbrella? Rain is coming down my neck."

230 "We're supposed to be roughing it," I said.

"Being in the middle isn't roughing it," Horse reminded me.

I folded the umbrella up so we all could get soaked equally. ●

"Hey!" I cried. "Look!" Staring up ahead, I could make out tollbooths⁶ and the dim outlines of buildings.

"Last one off the bridge is a rotten egg!" Horse shouted and began to run. The next second, he tripped and took off like an F-36 fighter plane. Unfortunately, he landed like
240 a Hell-cat dive-bomber⁷ as his mattress unspooled before him and then slammed into a big puddle.

● CHARACTER AND THEME

Reread lines 230–234. What do the boys' definitions of "roughing it" tell you about them?

5. **Holy smoke:** an old slang expression meaning "My goodness."

6. **tollbooths:** booths at which drivers must stop to pay a toll, or small fee.

7. **Hell-cat dive-bomber:** a World War II plane that took off from and returned to an aircraft carrier.

discard (dĭ-skārd') v. to throw away

CHARACTER AND THEME

Why is Max relieved to find the campsite full of garbage?

retrieve (rĭ-trēv') v. to get back again

Max and I ran to help. Horse was damp. His mattress was soaked. When he tried to roll it up, water cascaded like Niagara Falls.

"Better leave it," Max said.

"It's what I sleep on at home," Horse said as he slung the soaking, dripping mass over his shoulder.

When we got off the bridge, we were in a small plaza. To the left was the roadway, full of roaring cars. In front of us, 250 aside from the highway, there was nothing but buildings. Only to the right were there trees.

"North is that way," Max said, pointing toward the trees. We set off.

"How come you're limping?" Horse asked me. My foot *was* killing me. All I said, though, was, "How come you keep rubbing your arm?"

"I'm keeping the blood moving."

We approached the grove of trees. "Wow," Horse exclaimed. "Country." But as we drew closer, what we 260 found were discarded cans, bottles, and newspapers—plus an old mattress spring.

"Hey," Max cried, sounding relieved, "this is just like Brooklyn." ❧

I said, "Let's find a decent place, make camp, and eat."

It was hard to find a campsite that didn't have junk. The growing dark didn't help. We had to settle for the place that had the least amount of garbage.

Max said, "If we build a lean-to, it'll keep us out of the rain." He and Horse went a short distance with the hatchet.

270 Seeing a tree they wanted, Max whacked at it. The hatchet bounced right out of his hand. There was not even a dent in the tree. Horse retrieved the hatchet and checked the blade. "Dull," he said.

"Think I'm going to carry something sharp and cut myself?" Max protested. They contented themselves with picking up branches.

I went in search of firewood, but everything was wet. When I finally gathered some twigs and tried to light them, the only thing that burned was my fingers.

280 Meanwhile, Horse and Max used their branches to build a lean-to directly over me. After many collapses—which didn't help my work—they finally got the branches to stand in a shaky sort of way.

"Uh-oh," Horse said. "We forgot to bring something for a cover."

Max eyed me. "Didn't you say you brought a blanket?"

"No way!" I cried.

"All in favor of using the blanket!"

Horse and Max both cried, "Aye."

290 Only after I built up a mound of partially burned match sticks and lit *them*, did I get the fire going. It proved that where there's smoke there doesn't have to be much fire. The guys meanwhile draped my blanket over their branch construction. It collapsed twice. **PAUSE & REFLECT**

PAUSE & REFLECT

How do the boys' experiences so far reflect the prediction you made on page 147?

About an hour after our arrival, the three of us were gathered inside the tiny space. There was a small fire, but more light came from my flickering flashlight.

"No more rain," Horse said with pride.

"Just smoke," I said, rubbing my stinging eyes.

300 "We need a vent hole," Horse pointed out.

"I could cut it with the hatchet," Max said.

"It's my mother's favorite blanket."

"And you took it?" Max said.

I nodded.

"You *are* tough," Horse said.

PREDICT

Reread lines 306–309 and circle the adjective the narrator uses to describe the other guys. Make a prediction about whether the narrator's statement will turn out to be true.

Besides having too much smoke in our eyes and being wet, tired, and in pain, we were starving. I almost said something about giving up, but as far as I could see, the other guys were still tough. ㉔

310 Max put his frying pan atop my smoldering smoke. After dumping in the entire contents of his mustard bottle, he threw in the franks. Meanwhile, I bolted down my last sandwich.

"What am I going to eat?" Horse suddenly said.

"Your beans," I reminded him.

Max offered up his hatchet. "Here. Just chop off the top end of the can."

320 "Oh, right," Horse said. He selected a can, set it in front of him, levered himself onto his knees, then swung down—hard. There was an explosion. For a stunned moment, we just sat there, hands, face, and clothing dripping with beans.

Suddenly Max shouted, "Food fight! Food fight!" and began to paw the stuff off and fling it around.

Having a food fight in a cafeteria is one thing. Having one in the middle of a soaking wet lean-to with cold beans during a dark, wet New Jersey night is another. In seconds, the lean-to was down, the fire kicked over, and Max's frankfurters dumped on the ground.

330 "The food!" Max screamed, and began to snatch up the franks. Coated with mustard, dirt, grass, and leaves, they looked positively prehistoric. Still, we wiped the franks clean on our pants then ate them—the franks, that is. Afterward, we picked beans off each other's clothes—the way monkeys help friends get rid of lice.

For dessert, Max shared some Tootsie Rolls. After Horse swallowed his sixteenth piece, he announced, "I don't feel so good."

The thought of his getting sick was too much. "Let's
340 go home," I said, ashamed to look at the others. To my
surprise—and relief—nobody objected.

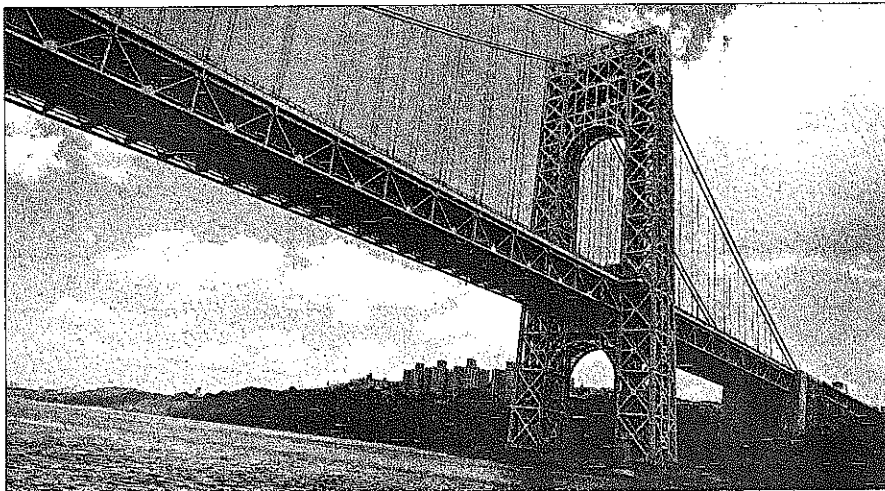
Wet and cold, our way lit by my fast-fading flashlight, we
gathered our belongings—most of them, anyway. As we
made our way back over the bridge, gusts of wind-blown
rain pummeled us until I felt like a used-up punching bag.
By the time we got to the subway station, my legs were
melting fast. The other guys looked bad too. Other riders
moved away from us. One of them murmured, "Juvenile
delinquents." To cheer us up, I got out my comic books,
350 but they had congealed into a lump of red, white, and blue
pulp.

congeal (kən-jēl') v. to make into
a solid mass

With the subways running slow, it took hours to get
home. When we emerged from the High Street Station, it
was close to midnight.

Before we split up to go to our own homes, we just stood
there on a street corner, embarrassed, trying to figure out
how to end the day gracefully. I was the one who said,
"Okay, I admit it. I'm not as tough as you guys. I gave up
first."

360 Max shook his head. "Naw. I wanted to quit, but I
wasn't tough enough to do it." He looked to Horse.



simultaneously (sī'məl-tā'nē-əs-lə) *adv.* at the same time

**CHARACTER AND
THEME**

Reread lines 353–368. Pay attention to how Horse and Max react to the narrator's confession. In what ways have their attitudes changed?

The boys agree to not tell Mr. Brenkman that they gave up. How have the boys stayed the same?

Horse made a fist. "You saying I'm the one who's tough?" he demanded. "I hate roughing it!"


"Me too," I said quickly.

"Same for me," Max said.

Horse said, "Only thing is, we just have to promise not to tell Mr. Brenkman."

Grinning with relief, we simultaneously clasped hands.

"No matter what," Max reminded us.

370 To which I added, "Scout's Honor." 

Literary Analysis: Character and Theme

In the chart below, record each character's important statements and actions, what lessons he learns, and how he changes. Then, write a theme statement.



READING 3 Analyze, make inferences, and draw conclusions about theme in different cultural and contemporary contexts. **3A** Infer the implicit theme of a work of fiction.

| | Narrator | Horse | Max |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------|-----|
| Statements/ Actions | "I like roughing it." | | |
| What He Learns | | | |
| How He Changes | | | |

Theme Statement:

Academic Vocabulary in Speaking

attitude

context

communicate

illustrate

implicit



READING 3 Draw conclusions about theme and genre in different historical contexts. **3A** Infer the implicit theme of a work of fiction, distinguishing theme from topic.

TURN AND TALK With a partner, discuss how historical **context** influences the theme of Avi's story. (Remember that the story takes place in 1946.) How would the events be different if the story were set in modern times? Use at least two Academic Vocabulary words in your discussion. Definitions of these words are on page 113.

Texas Assessment Practice

DIRECTIONS Use "Scout's Honor" to answer questions 1–6.

- 1 Why do the boys need to take a camping trip?
 - (A) to overcome their fears
 - (B) to earn the Scout Craft badge
 - (C) to advance to the Tenderfoot rank
 - (D) to impress Scoutmaster Brenkman
- 2 What makes the narrator finally decide it is time to go home?
 - (F) the rain
 - (G) the lack of dinner
 - (H) the possibility of Horse getting sick
 - (J) the destruction of the shelter and his mother's blanket
- 3 How is the narrator different from his friends?
 - (A) He is more of a leader.
 - (B) He is not as tough.
 - (C) He lies to people.
 - (D) He is funnier.
- 4 What word best describes how the narrator feels when his friends agree to go home?
 - (F) upset
 - (G) excited
 - (H) relieved
 - (J) confused
- 5 How do the boys change by the end of the story?
 - (A) They are no longer friends.
 - (B) They now appreciate camping.
 - (C) They are now Second Class scouts.
 - (D) They are no longer competing to be the toughest.
- 6 Which of the following is not a clue to a story's theme?
 - (F) what the characters say and do
 - (G) what lessons the characters learn
 - (H) whether the characters face conflict
 - (J) whether the characters change in any way